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ABSTRACT

The Manitoba Task Force on Literacy conducted public hearings to determine the root causes of illiteracy in the province and to make recommendations for programs to help adults become literate. The Task Force was especially solicitous of the opinions of learners--illiterate people who are now participating in literacy education programs. Some of the causes the Task Force found were the following: (1) cultural differences/school-community conflicts; (2) socioeconomic problems; (3) individual/societal attitudes; (4) language differences or confusions; and (5) unmet special needs (such as learning disabilities and physical handicaps). The Task Force recommended that strategies should be created for keeping at-risk students on the path toward literacy in school. Other strategies should be devised for bringing back those who do leave school and creating appropriate adult literacy programs. The task force's 28 recommendations include several made for specific groups of potential learners, such as nonnative speakers of English and the aboriginal community. Others concern the establishment of Manitoba adult literacy council and a new literacy office within Manitoba Education, supports for the learner, the at-risk student, English as a second language, and training and education for educators and literacy workers. Throughout the report, potential learners and literacy project participants are quoted extensively. (KC)

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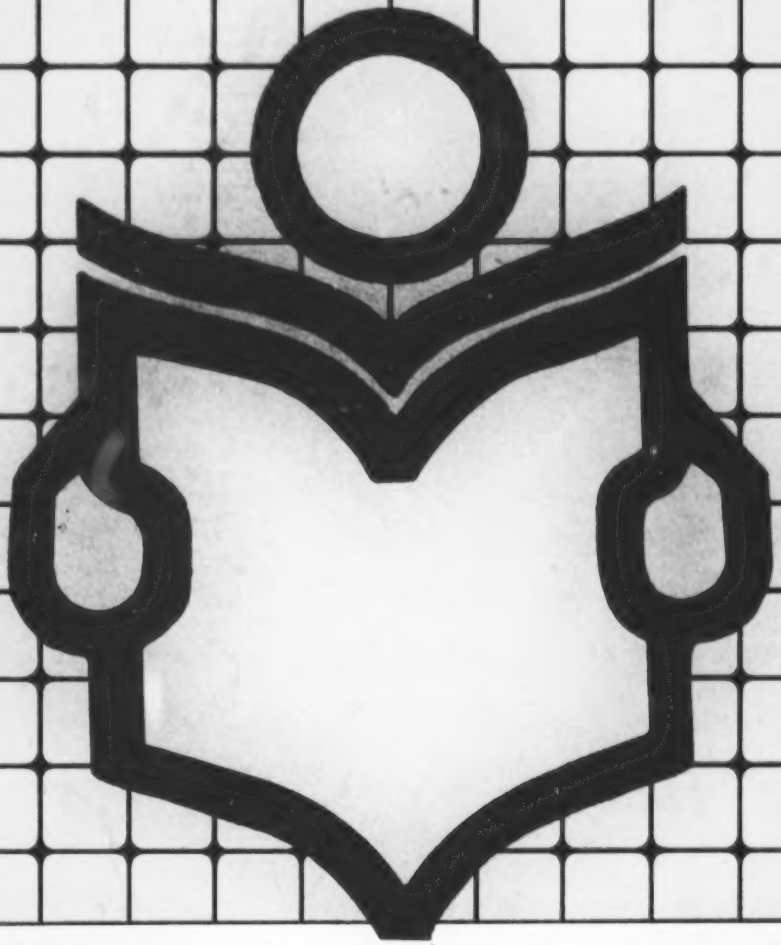

PATHWAYS FOR THE LEARNER

A STRATEGY FOR LITERACY FOR MANITOBANS

THE REPORT OF THE MANITOBA TASK FORCE ON LITERACY

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Pathways For the Learner

A Strategy For Literacy For Manitobans

The Report of the

Manitoba Task Force On Literacy

April 1989

This report is also available in French and can be obtained from the Department of Education and Training, Communications Branch, 116-1200 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg R3G 0T5, or by calling 945-6185.

Pathways For the Learner

Literacy and Illiteracy in Manitoba

Evolving Perceptions of the Problem

literacy, *n.* ability to read and write
The Concise Oxford Dictionary

Traditionally in Manitoba and elsewhere in Canada literacy has been defined in terms of the ability to read that would be expected from a student who had successfully completed a certain grade in the school system. Typically, reading and writing at the Grade 9 level, or at a level suitable for entry into high school are seen as benchmarks.

This reference to the formal school system reflects the fact that passage through our system of universal education is the "highway" that has led to literacy for Manitobans.

It is assumed that those who have successfully completed their schooling in Manitoba will be equipped with reading and mathematical skills appropriate to enable them to function effectively and successfully in our society and especially to meet the requirements for employment and achieving financial independence.

In Manitoba, then, literacy has been understood as being equivalent to having achieved a certain grade level in the education system, and has been valued largely because of its implications for the ability of the individual to achieve financial success or independence through employment.

> **illiterate** *a.* & *n.* uneducated, especially unable to read
> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*

Conversely, illiteracy in Manitoba has tended to be understood as equivalent to having failed to achieve a certain grade level in the education system, and has been seen as undesirable primarily because of its implications for the ability of the individual to achieve financial success or independence through employment.

The illiterate are those who — for whatever reason — have not travelled successfully down the "highway to literacy" provided by the education system and the public school system in particular.

Typically, these individuals face a range of difficulties in their efforts to function effectively and successfully in our society. Technological changes, the evolution of the "information society" and labour market changes have made illiteracy a greater bar to employment or financial success than in the past. Beyond its economic impact, illiteracy — the lack of skills in reading, writing, calculating and communicating — limits the individual's access to self-development and self-fulfillment in a literate community.

The range of practical difficulties encountered by these individuals affects virtually every aspect of their lives, reducing the choices and options available to them.

Those who have not achieved literacy are unable to:

- complete the written parts of driver's tests
- read to their children or help them with their homework
- read newspapers or books
- write letters to maintain contact with friends or family
- earn promotions in their employment
- take advantage of training or educational opportunities for which the ability to read and write are prerequisites
- order products from catalogues
- operate computers.

The list goes on, and the Task Force heard of the frustrations faced by those who — for whatever reason — have not made a successful journey down the "highway to literacy".

Literacy programs have focused on the development of grade-equivalent literacy and numeracy skills, normally as prerequisites for entry into job training programs. In the past, these programs have tended to be offered through schools as a sort of extension of the role of the school as the highway to literacy.

The approach was normative: **illiteracy was wrong, and the need was for illiterate individuals to conform to a set of expectations based on the "normal" outcomes of the education system.**

Over the years, the various programs offered by governments have permitted thousands of people to achieve this conformity. But thousands of others have not.

Increasingly, those who have been concerned with literacy in Manitoba have formed a new view of this phenomenon — a view centred, not on the normative "illiteracy is wrong" perceptions of the past, but on the motivations, desires and commitment of those for whom the highway to literacy has not achieved the expected results.

The "Learner" and An Evolving View of Literacy

As society's understanding of literacy has evolved, illiteracy is less and less defined in terms of grade equivalents or even employment effects.

Instead, it is defined in terms of the needs and desires of the individual: **literacy problems are seen as occurring when, through a lack of reading, writing, communicating or mathematical ability, an individual is prevented from performing an activity or activities or achieving goals that are meaningful and desirable to him or her.**

The "learner" is an individual who, perceiving a lack of reading, writing, communicating or mathematical ability as a barrier to the performance of activities or achievement of goals that are meaningful and desirable, seeks to acquire these abilities for his or her own purposes.

The purposes for which learners seek literacy are many and varied.

An adult who dropped out of school years ago may seek learning to help obtain a job or for advancement in an existing job. An immigrant may seek literacy to shop for his or her family or to communicate with the people who are teaching his or her children here in Canada.

A low-income parent may become a learner to be able to help children with school work in the hope that they will be able to earn higher incomes and enjoy greater financial security in the future.

In the world of the learner, then, grade equivalents or even employment applicability are not necessarily relevant indicators of literacy or illiteracy.

The key determinant is the learner's own goals, and his or her perception of the need to acquire literacy skills in order to meet those goals.

The Task Force subscribes to this "learner centred" view of literacy. Within this view, we believe **illiteracy is most properly defined as:**

> ***A lack of skills perceived by individuals or groups as being necessary to fulfill their own self-determined objectives as individuals, family and community members, consumers, job holders and members of social, religious or other associations of their own choosing.***

And **literacy is most usefully understood as:**

> ***The ability to read, write, comprehend and use mathematics adequately to satisfy the requirement the learner sets for him or herself as being important for his or her own life.***

"The only literacy that matters is the literacy that is in use."

M.M. Lewis

The phenomenon of the learner — of the individual who identifies a lack of skills as personally important and who seeks actively to acquire those skills — exists as a community wide phenomenon as well.

"Learner communities" are groups within the population who see the development of reading, writing and mathematical skills as means to achieve shared goals.

The Aboriginal community in Manitoba is increasingly a "learner community", viewing increased literacy as a key step in the strengthening of Aboriginal culture and in the efforts of the Aboriginal community to assume growing responsibility for and control over its own affairs.

Immigrants to Canada form another set of learner communities, seeking to develop literacy as well as linguistic skills as fundamental tools in their efforts to build lives for themselves in Canadian society.

The Key Transformation: From Illiterate to Learner

An illiterate person is one who cannot read or write. In many cases, individuals may accept that state of affairs. They may place little value on literacy. Their inability to read or write may be only one element in a range of socio-economic disadvantages from poor housing to malnutrition to unemployment.

They may accept illiteracy as normal, and see learning to read and write as something that "students" do in schools — an activity for children. They may see no alternative to the school system's highway to literacy. They may have had unpleasant or humiliating experiences in the school system and associate these experiences with the act of learning to read or write. They may be immigrants who never acquired literacy in their first language,

That their inability to read or write will contribute to their overall difficulties and reduce their options or ability to change their situations is undeniable. That these impacts will become more severe as technological changes pass by those who lack basic literacy skills is equally undeniable.

But for the illiterate, acquiring these skills is not seen as a practical or priority goal. The illiterate accepts that he or she lacks the power to become literate.

The transformation from illiterate to learner occurs when the individual identifies the value of literacy for him or herself, and begins to seek ways of acquiring this knowledge and these skills.

The goal of government literacy programming should be:

- to encourage and support the transformation from illiterate to learner
- to empower the learner to achieve literacy by providing a range of pathways to literacy, reflecting the central role of the learner and responding to his or her individual goals and situation.

The recommendations in this report can contribute to these fundamental goals.

The Manitoba Task Force On Literacy

The Manitoba Task Force On Literacy was appointed by the Minister of Education on October 14, 1988.

The **Mandate** of the Task Force on Literacy was to determine the magnitude of the problem among the groups affected and to recommend a strategy for continuous programming on literacy in order to meet their needs.

The **Terms of Reference** of the Task Force were to:

a) Consult broadly with individuals, interest groups, employees, public institutions, public and independent schools, colleges and universities;

b) Conduct research on the alternatives for delivery of literacy programs to special target groups such as adults, Aboriginal people, new Canadians and young school dropouts;

c) Conduct research in consideration of ongoing government and private sector programs that provide literacy training to Manitobans, including distance education, tutorials, classroom instruction and community based instruction such as education in the workplace;

d) Hold public consultations throughout Manitoba to hear public concerns and to acertain any problems or gaps that exist in literacy training;

e) Establish principles for literacy that are meaningful for Manitobans;

f) Accumulate and analyze all the information collected and synthesize it into a report, with recommendations to the Minister, outlining a strategy for continuous programming on literacy.

The Membership of the Task Force

The members of the Task Force were selected not only on the basis of their professional skills and experience, but also to be representative of those communities and groups that have been particularly affected by this problem. Since all continued in their normal employment while serving on the Task Force, the work of completing this report required significant personal sacrifice.

The Members of the Task Force were:

- **Rosemary Vodrey - Chairperson** — School psychologist, former broadcaster, adult learner (law), active community contributor
- **Julia Boon** — Private language school administrator
- **Claire Comte** — Nurse and active member of the Francophone community
- **Sharon Fiddler** — Administrator with an Aboriginal School Board
- **Eric Jonasson** — School Trustee and member of the Manitoba School Trustees Association (replacement for Vern Kulyk)
- **Gaston Joseph** — Administrator with the Manitoba Community Colleges
- **Gary Kilarr** — University professor specializing in reading and language arts curriculum
- **Fredelina Paqueo** — Realtor and active member of the Philippine Association (replacement for Dely Bernardo)
- **Srini Reddy** — Superintendent of schools and executive member of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents
- **Betty Husby** — Incoming president, the Manitoba Teachers Society (replacement for Charles Tinman)

The Task Force Staff were:

- Bob Gorchynski - Executive Director
- Robin Millar - Researcher
- Lori Penner - Researcher
- Darlene Joss - Administrative Secretary

Task Force Operations

The first Task Force meeting was held on October 21, 1988 and the last was held on April 7, 1989.

The final recommendations of the Task Force were submitted to the Minister of Education at the end of April, 1989.

The Task Force held a total of 29 public hearings throughout Manitoba. The initial schedule was expanded to include an additional hearing in Winnipeg to meet public demand. Although bad weather in January forced the cancellation of two meetings scheduled for Grand Rapids and Gimli, we did receive advice and submissions from interested groups and individuals in those two centres.

The Working Principles

Prior to the public hearings, the Task Force established the following working principles :

1. Literacy is a dominant cultural value in Canada. Therefore, literacy is a fundamental right of all citizens.
2. All citizens have the right to full access of opportunity to develop literacy skills commensurate with their personal needs and the needs of their communities.
3. Definitions of literacy are dynamic and changing, dependent upon the cultural, social, economic, geographic, political, and historic setting of the individual.
4. Literacy is the ability to use the skills of reading, writing, calculating, and communicating for the purpose of self-development and self-fulfillment.
5. Canada is a multicultural society and thus the linguistic heritage and languages of all of its citizens must be valued through first language - literacy experiences and acknowledgement of past learning history.
6. Oral language skills are part of, but not exclusive to, the development of the skills of literacy.

The Methodology

In its early stages of operation, the Task Force on Literacy identified four major stages in its life cycle. These stages were:

- information gathering
- public hearings
- analysis and evaluation
- report preparation and writing.

Information Gathering and Research

This initial stage involved developing a sense of direction, purpose and an operational framework to meet the mandate of the Task Force. This included:,

- preparing working principles for literacy which would attempt to provide a meaningful understanding of literacy for Manitobans; and
- obtaining and becoming familiar with major reports and materials written, on the subject of literacy, from Manitoba, Canada and international sources.

The literacy information collected included relevant research studies, journal articles, publications, publicity materials as well as information on literacy programs operating in various parts of the world.

In addition, Task Force members visited a number of public and private programs in Winnipeg offering literacy training, including: Journeys Adult Education, Winnipeg Adult Education Centre, Beat the Streets, Red River Community College, Adult and Continuing Education, the Applied Linguistics Centre, the Parent Child Centre (Pinkham School) the Human Resources Centre and Lion's Place (Seniors' Centre).

During this stage, reports prepared by other task forces and organizations were reviewed and analyzed.

Research reports that have been undertaken by our researcher include:

1. Models of adult literacy programming
2. Alternate programming for "at risk" students
3. Private institutions delivering language/literacy programming
4. Drop-outs
5. School divisions delivering adult literacy/ESL programming
6. Women in literacy
7. Literacy Councils/Campaigns
8. The Case for Mother Tongue Literacy

(Copies of these reports are available in a separate Appendices volume)

The Public Hearings

The mandate of the Task Force included a requirement to consult broadly with the public. To meet this requirement, we reviewed and selected locations for public hearings, based on an identified community interest in literacy programs, province-wide regional representation and communities whose members included large numbers of current or potential learners.

It was decided to hold 10 public hearings in Winnipeg and 20 public hearings in rural and northern Manitoba. Some communities would have two public hearings in different locations during the same day, in order to obtain representation from the different groups located there. Similarly, Winnipeg was earmarked for 10 hearings to accommodate various communities contained within, and to focus on the identified target groups: urban Aboriginal people, new Canadians, Seniors and drop-outs. Community-based hearings would ensure better access to and representation from those groups.

The Task Force divided itself into groups of three to make it possible to schedule all 30 public hearings between December 8th, 1988 and February 2nd, 1989.

The Task Force is pleased with the outcome of the public hearings, both from the number and quality of presenters that have come forward. In total, more than 350 presentations and submissions were received from all parts of the community.

Although the Task Force publicized its activities in both French and English, and contacted leaders and educators in the francophone community directly, we received only one submission from that community. In our discussions, we were informed that there is concern among some franco-Manitobans that the value of francophone literacy is not fully appreciated in their community.

In our recommendations, we urge that the government take action to respond to this concern, and to provide appropriate support for francophone literacy activities in Manitoba.

The Learner's Perspective

We were particularly pleased at the contributions made by learners throughout Manitoba. These individuals, who have identified the development of literacy skills as important to the achievement of particular purposes they have selected, and who are actively seeking pathways to literacy, contributed to a growing understanding among all Task Force members of literacy as a personal phenomenom and experience.

We quote from their comments and insights throughout this report, and the recommendations here owe much to the passion and the personal commitment these learners brought to the Task Force process.

The Root Causes of Illiteracy in Manitoba

Those who are illiterate in Manitoba are those who have not benefitted from a "normal" and expected progression through the school system — Manitoba's highway to literacy.

The reasons this occurs are many and varied, and can reflect individual circumstances or complex relationships involving the school and the community at large. These causes can be clustered in the following ways:

Cultural Differences/School-Community Conflicts

In some cases, there is conflict between the cultural values of the community and those of the school. These can be reflected in parental resistance to education and a lack of effective communication between school and parents. In these situations the schools and the education they offer may be perceived as irrelevant or alien.

Cultural differences can lead to perceptions of negative labelling by teachers and/or the school, and perceptions that teachers are insensitive and the system inflexible and unresponsive to the needs of the students or the community.

In these settings, the student is less likely to be motivated towards or receptive to learning, and the school is less likely to be able to communicate knowledge or concepts in a manner that is meaningful to the student.

Socio-Economic Problems

Poverty can act as a major barrier to progress through the highway to literacy. Young people affected by housing problems, unemployment, low hope and self-esteem are less likely to be successful in school. Those whose lives are transient, due to work or life needs have reduced access to an orderly and systematic experience in the school system. Others have to leave school to work, contributing to their own care or that of their families.

Individual/Societal Attitudes

Real or perceived racism and/or acceptance of racial stereotypes can undermine the student's real access to literacy through the public school system.

Individual attitudes or practices — rebelliousness, substance abuse, low self esteem — can all act as barriers to literacy for young Manitobans.

Language Differences or Confusions

Adults who immigrate to Canada without knowing English have no access to the "normal" age 6 to age 18 progress through the educational system. There may be conflict between their mother tongue and English; they may not have been literate in their mother tongue and, in their prior society, literacy may have had less value with the result that they may perceive no need to acquire English literacy.

Children of immigrants, who "live" in one language at home and another at school, may encounter special difficulties as they attempt to learn basic oral language skills and literacy simultaneously.

For many Aboriginal Manitobans, English is a second language, and so they may begin their formal education without adequate English language skills to progress successfully through the school system. Perceptions that the school places little value on their mother tongue can represent an additional barrier to learning.

Unmet Special Needs

Learning disorders, blindness, deafness or physical handicaps can act as barriers to the achievement of literacy among children, and can limit access to literacy throughout adult life where these special needs are not met or accommodated in the school system or other sources of literacy instruction.

Other factors can contribute as root causes for illiteracy in Manitoba. They may include geographical barriers, like distance from the nearest school, lack of access to books or suitable and relevant literacy materials.

In many rural and Northern communities, there are no library facilities. Even where facilities exist, they lack sufficient resources to operate special children's or outreach programs, purchase books or materials that are relevant to the local population or take other measures that could contribute very positively to the development of literacy.

But fundamentally, illiteracy is the result when — for whatever reason — individuals or groups do not have a successful experience with the school system. The education system, for its part, does succeed in guiding the vast majority of Manitoba children through an orderly process that leads them to literacy: for the majority, it is an effective highway to literacy.

But where individuals do not travel that highway, there is need for additional pathways for the learner — alternative ways of achieving access to the literacy skills they need to meet their goals in life.

A Strategy For Prevention

Keeping "At-Risk" Students on the Highway to Literacy

As literacy has become increasingly essential for employment or self-fulfillment in a literate community, schools and the community at large have redoubled their efforts to persuade young people not be become "drop outs". Students are urged to complete their "normal" progress through the school system or face a life of limitations.

Not all have been able to heed those warnings.

The Task Force believes there is significant potential for schools to develop a dual preventative strategy that can help ensure more students benefit from Manitoba's highway to literacy.

One part of the strategy should focus on identification of "at risk" students — those for whom the school experience is so unsatisfying that they are likely to withdraw or, at best, unlikely to learn — and on the development of mechanisms and supports to encourage and enable them to stay.

The second part of the strategy should focus on the development of appropriate pathways back in for those who do withdraw from school.

Responses to the "At-Risk" Student — the Student As Learner

The "at-risk" student commonly faces a range of problems that are not directly related to his or her academic performance. These may include a family situation of poverty or disadvantage, of drug, alcohol or sexual abuse.

> *"Literacy is merely one dimension of lives that are disadvantaged and disaffected... [many at-risk students] are hungry, they are sick, they are tired, they are often themselves involved in chemical or drug abuse of some kind. They are having horrendous problems where the number one thing in their lives is to survive."*
>
> Principal
> Winnipeg Inner City School.

Often these students have a history of low achievement and low self-esteem (they often function below the average for their grade in school). This low achievement may reflect difficulties in adjusting to school in the first place, second language problems, distress arising from the home situation or a range of other personal difficulties.

Other at-risk students may have cultural differences with their teachers or the school. Their interests may not coincide with the curriculum or their learning styles may be unconventional.

Young people with special needs may find themselves at a disadvantage and, where these needs are not responded to or accommodated, their real access to learning is undermined.

Such students often feel isolated in school. They have often tended to be dismissed as "outsiders", "troublemakers" or "kids who just don't care".

Their experience with the school system is that it is rigid, distant and lacks humanity in responding to or accommodating their particular needs or situations.

The fundamental motivational challenge that teachers face is to transform these young people from low achievers into learners — into individuals who perceive the achievement of literacy as being directly relevant to their ability to achieve goals that are meaningful and important to them in individual terms. That challenge is a formidable one.

It is also a growing challenge. Our society is becoming more culturally varied. A higher proportion of all young people now attend school, with the result that programs and approaches that were successful in the past must be reconsidered in light of the growing diversity of the student population.

Many schools throughout the province are working actively to provide additional supports, programs and mechanisms to engage the at-risk student in an active and motivating learning process. Flexible scheduling, innovative programs and growing cultural sensitivity all help schools to respond more effectively to the at-risk student, and they are achieving significant successes, every day of the school year.

The Task Force understands, however, that schools cannot realistically hope to meet the needs of all of these at-risk students.

The demands on schools have increased tremendously in recent years. They are expected to provide new and imaginative programming to meet the needs of our changing society — including programs to familiarize students with technology that did not even exist when most teachers were trained. In addition, they are expected to contribute to improvements in the social, physical and mental health of their students, and to play an active role in building economic and job training opportunities for the young people in their care.

Increased understanding and responsiveness to the at-risk student throughout the school system can help ensure that more of these young people become learners on the highway to literacy. But inevitably, some students will drop out before becoming literate.

Because that is true, the second part of a preventative strategy should involve a focus on alternative pathways to literacy for young adults who have not completed school.

The Pathways Back In

According to the Southam Survey and other prior studies, more than one third of those who "drop out" of school do so intending to return for further education at some time in the future. Some do, and the school system has shown significant flexibility in permitting the return of these adults into the normal schedule of classes.

Despite these efforts, many confront significant barriers as they try to put their intention of seeking further education into action.

Many of the socio-economic factors that contribute to the learning problems people encounter in school can act as life long barriers to literacy. Lack of access to transportation or child care can make it impossible for an individual to pursue literacy. Lack of income or resources may prevent an illiterate person from becoming a learner.

Many of those who left had found school to be an unpleasant or even humiliating experience. It is understandable, then, that the prospect of returning to school is less than appealing. The custodial *in loco parentis* (in place of a parent) authority that the school has over its students — while it may be appropriate for the age groups normally involved — is a significant deterrent for those who have become independent and accustomed to being treated as adults.

In many cases, schools have the resources and the expertise to meet the educational goals of these adults, but a combination of perceptions and the reality of the school culture act as effective barriers to access for the potential adult learner.

Schools can make a significant contribution to the development of new pathways to literacy by providing access to their resources and expertise in the context of an adult learner culture.

Some who appeared before the Task Force suggested that positive educational responses to the adult learner could include such measures as:

- provision of literacy programs in non-school environments in the community
- parenting education and literacy development delivered in the home
- leadership by schools in promoting greater parental involvement and interest in their children's education
- provision of adult literacy programs not held on school premises.

In most communities across Manitoba, the school system does function as an effective highway to literacy for the vast majority of young people. Enhancing its ability to transform low achievers into learners, and to provide truly accessible alternative pathways to literacy for the adult learner is a responsibility that all school systems share.

The solutions will vary from community to community and from student to student, but a commitment to constant efforts to make literacy truly accessible is a central part of the role of education in Manitoba.

The Adult Learner in Manitoba

The Pathways to Literacy: Learner Centred, Community-Based

During our public hearings, the Task Force met with a wide range of literacy practitioners, administrators, professional groups, representatives of schools, colleges and libraries, teachers, learning specialists, and with representatives of provincial departments concerned with the development of adult literacy and with English As A Second Language (ESL) work.

Throughout the submissions we received and the discussions we held, the focus was consistent and it was on the learner — the individual who had chosen to pursue literacy for purposes that were meaningful to him or herself.

We were privileged to hear, too, from many of these individuals and were impressed by their determination and their genuine desire to learn.

Who Are the Learners?

Manitoba's learners represent a cross-section of our society who all have two things in common:

- they did not become "automatically" literate through a normal progress through the school system
- they have all identified the achievement of literacy as an important personal goal.

The individuals who are active as learners in various adult literacy programs across Manitoba include:

- people who left school for such reasons as
  - they had to work
  - pregnancy
  - school was too distant — geographically and/or culturally
  - they became disillusioned and could not cope with the school environment
  - English was their second language, and they could not comprehend the instructions of the school
- people who, finding themselves on welfare or in low paying jobs, seek literacy as a means of improving their position
- inmates from provincial and federal jails who seek literacy to better equip themselves for a re-entry to society
- seniors who had never learned to read or write beyond the beginner or intermediate level, but for whom these skills have now become important
- individuals with learning disabilities or other special needs that prevented them from becoming literate in the past
- Aboriginal people for whom the school system had seemed irrelevant and insensitive to their culture but who now see literacy as important in both cultural and personal terms
- individuals who are literate in their mother tongues and feel a need for that same competence in English
- individuals who, because they are deaf, visually impaired or physically handicapped, were unable to become literate earlier in their lives.

Their goals in seeking literacy are as various as they are.

"Learners expressed a wide variety of needs. Some had short term specific needs — like help filling out forms or applications. Others have more long-range goals such as taking a college course or training program.

"Students in literacy programs may be beginners who never had a chance to learn to read in school or they may have dropped out before completing grade 12."

Literacy Coordinator
Selkirk

"My lack of education really affected me in many areas... like when my kids walked in the door — because they wanted me to help them with their math or spelling and I'd make some kind of excuse because I was ashamed of myself... because I didn't want my kids to know how stupid I was..."

Adult Learner
Brandon Friendship Centre

"... that's why I'm so concerned about more education — that I could get a job that I'm interested in because right now my daughter is two years old, and if I could get more education before she is in school I could get a good job.

"Right now I'm on social allowance, that that's not what I want. I really would like to get out and have a job."

Adult Learner
Winkler

"They realize that in order to be able to function 'on the street' they have to continue their education — they have to get a skill so they can find a job."

Inmate Literacy Program Organizer

Seniors who spoke to the Task Force pointed to a range of reasons why they sought to become literate. Widowed persons may need literacy skills to do tasks that a literate spouse used to do for them. Grandparents may wish to be able to correspond with grandchildren, or to read them books. Seniors who had little chance to become literate when they were young may wish to pursue cultural interests.

Some Senior Citizens told the Task Force that literacy resources would be better employed to "help the young", but many Seniors do wish to become learners, and the Task Force believes the community should provide them with appropriate pathways to literacy.

Adult learners have a third very important thing in common with one another: they are adults who are accustomed to making their own decisions, just as they have made their own decision to seek literacy, for their own purposes.

"Accept and understand the difference between teaching children something new along with all the other new things in their lives and teaching adults a means to express what they already know. To an adult learning to read is a way of understanding — finally — something that he has been using for years, a way of understanding the same environment he has been living and working in..."

Adult Learner
Winnipeg

Although learners lack literacy skills and may, in part as consequence or cause, be less prosperous than others in the community, they and their friends, family, neighbours and associates in their own communities are capable of building and using the new pathways to literacy that are needed, if the resources are available.

"We feel that the needs should be identified from the community — not identified somewhere in the city and tried to fit into our community. We feel that all communities have different needs and everybody is different and fits in different slots... and we don't want to be fitted in the same square box.

"So we feel that should be taken into account... and we feel the community should have an input on the structure of [literacy] programs and every community is different. That should be taken into consideration."

Literacy Organizer
Camperville

The Task Force believes that effective adult literacy programs must be based on approaches and criteria that reflect the phenomenon of the adult learner: individuals who are seeking literacy for their own purposes.

Adult literacy programs should be responsive to the learner and should be viewed as tools and pathways the learner can use to achieve his or her goals.

"A literacy program is so wonderful for us, because it's the first time we've had anything like that offered to us and we learn by what people want. For example, if their interest is fishing, we get books on fishing and let them learn on that. And if somebody else is very religious, we get religious books and let them learn on that... or if someone else is interested in sewing, we get sewing books and they learn on that. So — it's whatever interests the people. That's where you've got to get them and keep them that way."

Literacy Organizer
Camperville

Viewed this way, pathways to literacy are doubly empowering:

- they provide the learner with access to the literacy skills he or she needs to meet personal goals
- they provide the learner and the community with tools and opportunities they can use to meet their shared goals.

That fundamental orientation — learner centred and community based — is not an invention of this Task Force. It reflects the experience and dedication of what could be called the "literacy community in Manitoba".

The barriers are still significant, however, and the learner needs courage to persist.

"... it isn't unusual for us to have a person come in for an interview, be accepted into the program, only to phone back or never show up and the reason being — he got ridiculed by his buddies for going to school — never got across the doorstep."

Literacy Trainer
Winkler

"... my teacher... only spoke English and I didn't understand so I just sat there and listened without knowing what she talked about... I was so afraid they would ask me something and I wouldn't know how to say it..."

Adult Learner
Winkler

"They are kind of scared because they think 'how could I do this?'"

Adult Learner
Winkler

Women in particular may face barriers in their search for literacy — because of their responsibilities for child care and the family or as a result of cultural patterns that mitigate against their efforts to learn.

"[it's hardest for] the women. That is because of the custom. In Cambodia, women always stay home and keep house. They cannot get out. This is the problem. They feel isolated. They are scared to get out sometimes because they don't know how to read and write..."

Refugee Learner
Winnipeg

"... there are countless (women) who do not succeed in overcoming their illiteracy because they do not connect to any opportunities for success or they are connected to programs which are so inadequate or inappropriate that failure rather than success is an inevitable conclusion.

"Barriers to women's learning must be removed — like lack of child care, lack of flexibility in program times and locations and lack of financial support."

Submission
Canadian Congress on Learning Opportunities
For Women (CCLOW)

Inmates face barriers due to a lack of continuity in literacy programs. They may be transferred from an institution that has a program to one where there is no space available or where the program is different. Upon release, they may not be able to gain entry into a suitable program to continue their progress towards literacy.

"It's a difficult transition to leave the institution — go on the street. That in itself is really difficult for a lot of them. And then to try to find a [literacy] program that they can attend... you know... there are many barriers... the wait lists are so long that when they leave... they can't continue...

"What concerns me here is for things to happen... somebody has to make it happen... who's out there making sure these things take place?"

Inmate Literacy Program Organizer

"It cannot be stressed enough that further education, support — be it social or financial — and follow-up [must] be made available to the inmate population when they leave the prison system."

Inmate Literacy Tutor

Handicapped and other special needs learners may find it impossible to participate in literacy programs.

"... in general our rural members are routinely unable to participate in community (literacy) programs, due to their location in buildings that are not wheelchair accessible. (For the visually impaired) in general reading materials are not often available in large print..."

Submission
The Manitoba League of the Physically Handicapped

The barriers to literacy — cultural, socio-economic, linguistic, physical and emotional — are significant. If Manitoba is to provide the pathways to literacy that learners across the province seek, those barriers must be addressed.

Literacy and the Aboriginal Community in Manitoba

The Emergence of a "Learner Community"

There is and has been a high incidence of illiteracy among Aboriginal Manitobans.

In part, this has reflected the social, health and environmental conditions under which these Manitobans have lived. In part it has reflected economic reality: there can be little motivation to become literate where there is no realistic opportunity for employment that would require literacy.

It has reflected the difficulties inherent in traditional efforts to transfer the "highway to literacy" of the school system into Aboriginal communities. On a practical basis, northern schools, for example, have had far higher teacher turnover than the average in the school system, inhibiting the development of positive relationships between teachers and students and between schools and the community.

Curriculum that responds to the realities of Aboriginal culture and the situation of Aboriginal people in our society has been slow to develop. Much of the "normal" approach of the school system has struck no responsive chord in the culture, values or customs of the Aboriginal community.

For many in these communities, English is a second language and so the task of achieving literacy skills has been doubly difficult. Many children enter school without the English language skills necessary for successful learning.

In many Aboriginal communities, there is little access to books or even to newspapers, and little tradition of written communication in English or in the community's mother tongue.

The high incidence of illiteracy among Aboriginal adults has limited the perceived relevance of literacy, and made it difficult for parents to assist in their children's education.

In short — all of the root causes that can lead to illiteracy have affected the Aboriginal community in Manitoba.

In effect, the vast majority of Aboriginal students have been "at-risk" students.

Limited resources, isolation and lack of community control or influence over schooling have hindered efforts to develop alternative programs or supports for these students.

The history is bleak. Manitoba's highway to literacy has not served Aboriginal people well, and persistent and general illiteracy in the Aboriginal community has been a major contributor to the problems that the community has faced.

Today, however, there is a significant change taking place that offers the real hope that this will be corrected.

The Key Trend: Aboriginal Assumption of Control and Responsibility

The most positive trend that has emerged is a growing assumption by the Aboriginal community of control over and responsibility for its own affairs. Within this trend, the community strives to adapt institutions to reflect the realities of its members' situations, aspirations and culture.

The strengthening and asserting of the value of Aboriginal culture is a key strategy the community is using in its efforts to ensure that Aboriginal people assume their rightful position in the community at large.

Increasingly, the achievement of literacy is seen as a powerful tool that can contribute to that cultural strengthening.

"The Native community does not see literacy as being merely the acquisition of reading and writing skills. These are an essential part of literacy [but] they do not in themselves create a literate individual. For us literacy involves a critical awareness of the forces shaping our society and the capacity to participate in movement to change this society for the better.

"It is within this broader vision we see the necessity of raising the level of consciousness of our people about their ability to learn and to liberate themselves from oppressive circumstances."

Submission
Indigenous Women's Collective of Manitoba.

In effect, the Aboriginal community is becoming a learner community: a community that perceives the achievement of literacy as essential to achieve shared goals.

In some communities, the search for literacy encompasses an effort to develop mother tongue literacy, to preserve the language and to strengthen the ability of community members to communicate with one another.

The numbers and influence of Aboriginal educators in the school system are providing a growing stability and an enhanced ability to form and maintain relationships with individual students and the community. And increasingly, within the climate this creates in that community, individuals are becoming learners — are seeking literacy to help achieve their personal goals.

Like adult learners in the community at large, they are looking for pathways to literacy that are appropriate for them. They are insisting that their reality and their purposes be taken into account, rather than simply conforming to the normative expectation of a system standardized on the educating of white, urban children.

"I used to be very shy but have overcome that — becoming more literate has helped my self-confidence. I would advise others who can't read and write to seek help and not be shy about it: you don't have to feel ashamed or feel less than others.

"To the educators, I would say that you look very confident and that you could help other students. You should smile, be natural, and friendly and help alleviate a student's shyness and fear.

"Finally — not all those who can't read and write come from alcoholic homes. For those from up north, life is demanding — for example, carrying wood and hauling water. Many kids are needed at home to help so each person's situation is different."

A Learner
Winnipeg Inner City

"I've seen teachers blow the confidence of a kid trying to learn the English language."

Aboriginal Educator
Island Lake

Pathways and Barriers For the Aboriginal Learner

Community based adult literacy programs have grown up in Aboriginal communities throughout Manitoba and in urban Friendship Centres. They strive to provide access to literacy skills that are appropriate for the goals of the individual learner.

They are hampered by a lack of material that reflects Aboriginal culture, by a lack of support for literacy programs that respond to the fact that — for many — English is a second language.

They are hampered by isolation, by a lack of access to books and by perceptions that are still held by some that literacy is not relevant or important for Aboriginal people.

Teaching and learning methodologies that could respond to these barriers, such as distance teaching/learning techniques and computer aided literacy learning, are generally unavailable. Facilities like libraries normally do not exist.

They are hampered by a lack of resources.

Literacy is not considered to be a fundable part of education by the federal government, the jurisdiction responsible for education on Indian Reserves.

Postive efforts to develop mother tongue literacy — like the efforts that are being made in the community of Island Lake with its unique dialect, appear to fall within no government program.

The funding that does exist for adult literacy programs, through the Federal Secretary of State's Department, has been short term and it has been limited.

As a result, learners — individuals who, for their own purposes, have chosen to pursue literacy — find the pathways crowded.

"Students become very frustrated when they phone and say 'I'd really like to go to school' and I say 'I'm sorry, I can't take you right now,.. and you are going to be number twenty-five on the waiting list'."

Literacy Instructor
Brandon Friendship Centre

The lack of established funding programs and established criteria acts as a barrier to community efforts to build pathways to literacy for their members.

"... the local CEIC informed me that they could not fund this particular [literacy program] proposal due to the fact that there were applications coming in from individual member bands and they were sure to be in a dilemma: who do they fund?

"... This was their reason for turning down the project."

Aboriginal Educator
Fairford Reserve

The evolution of increased Aboriginal community control over and responsibility for its own affairs offers an unparalleled opportunity to Manitoba. As one part of this phenomenon, the Aboriginal community in Manitoba is emerging as a "learner community", and there is a realistic opportunity now for Aboriginal people themselves to fashion the pathways to literacy their people need to meet their shared and individual goals.

It would be tragic were that opportunity to be wasted through a lack of response and support from government.

The "English As A Second Language" Community

Literacy As A Pathway Into Canadian Society

Immigrants and refugees who come to Manitoba face a wide range of challenges as they strive to build new lives for themselves and their families. They come from a wide range of countries, cultures and social, economic and educational backgrounds.

Some are literate or even highly educated in their mother tongue. For them, acquiring a comparable competence in English is essential if they are to be able to function in society in Manitoba in a manner that is satisfactory to them.

These individuals face the intense frustration of being unable to communicate at the levels they are accustomed to.

"Illiterates are often assumed to be uneducated but that is most often not the case with immigrants... who are often well-educated in their own language. They are thus not like children learning a system. They are more like stroke victims who have a wealth of education, information and experience in their heads but who are unable to express or articulate it."

ESL Teacher
Applied Linguistics Centre

Educated immigrants and refugees face barriers in their efforts to acquire professional or other employment related qualifications that compare with those they had achieved in their previous countries.

They face barriers in their attempts to acquire the specific vocabularies necessary to work in their own fields, and uncertainties as to the recognition of their overseas credentials in Canada.

While the Task Force is not competent to draw conclusions as to the fairness of the basis upon which overseas credentials are accepted by various professional governing bodies, our members do believe that this is an area that should be examined by government.

Others come to Canada with little or no education or literacy in their mother tongues. For them, acquiring the language and achieving literacy in English is a double challenge, but language and literacy skills are seen as necessary to obtain employment and to carry out such other normal activities as seeing a doctor, opening a bank account or communicating with the schools where their children are being educated.

"... when they take some time to go to school... there is insensitivity. They don't understand that these people don't even know how to read in their own language.

"They get frustrated. They try and they try and then they quit and become isolated — especially women."

Immigrant Learner
International Centre

"Most people from Cambodia grew up with a background of living in war so they have no school. Even their own language they don't have because they live in war. As you heard in Cambodia... when it was under the communists... they killed most of the knowledgeable people... so the rest (are) illiterate people..."

Refugee Learner
International Centre

In some cases, people come to Canada from societies in which women fail to receive education, are cloistered, do not pursue careers outside the home or are not considered equals within the community. These cultural patterns can act as barriers for these women as they strive to achieve literacy — and the equality they have a right to in Canadian society.

In other cases, people come to Canada from totalitarian or authoritarian societies in which governments are objects of fear. They may be reluctant to participate in literacy programs.

Providing pathways to literacy for the English As A Second Language (ESL) community requires that:

- they be aware of the opportunity to acquire literacy
- pathways to literacy exist that are sensitive to cultural differences
- pathways to literacy exist that are responsive to the personal goals of each learner
- adequate supports exist to make it possible for individuals to participate in literacy programs.

Lack of child care and financial resources is a major obstacle to many immigrants' efforts to become literate in English. There are different levels of financial support provided for immigrants and refugees who wish to participate in ESL programs. The federal government provides funding for refugees, but immigrants receive no such support.

"... the immigrant community lacks as compared to the refugees — the refugees come here sponsored by the government. Therefore the first six months of arrival in Canada they are sponsored and they get an opportunity to be educated whereas the immigrant community came and they have start working and have no means of surviving. They are working two jobs in order to survive."

Immigrant Learner
International Centre

"I have a relative here and she's worked in the factory ever since she came. She's such a bright one. She's intelligent, she could do so much more. She's been sick. She has no opportunity — not even to go to the doctor. She has to call someone to go to the doctor all the time. She can't even answer the telephone."

Immigrant Learner
International Centre

In most cases, learners in ESL programs are seeking to acquire literacy as part of an overall competence to function effectively in the Canadian context. These programs can better serve such goals if they include life style information about Canada, including information about laws, customs and values.

"... one of the biggest problems is the law. We don't know what the laws request from us."

Immigrant Learner
International Centre

"... is very hard to find a job sometimes because they know nothing about the environment, the customs, the law, the culture of Canada..."

Immigrant Learner
Applied Linguistics Centre

Multicultural Communities And The ESL Pathways To Literacy

Manitoba's multicultural society is based on the belief that our total culture and community benefits from the retention and strengthening of the various cultural heritages that Manitobans have.

Throughout the province, multicultural organizations have grown up who focus their activities on the preservation and enhancement of their particular ethno-cultural heritages and who contribute actively and positively to diversity in Manitoba.

These groups, through their understanding of their original cultures and of the Manitoba community can also act as powerful partners for individual learners in their efforts to achieve literacy in Manitoba.

Within the concept of multiculturalism, it is not necessary or desirable for an individual to give up his or her original culture in order to become Canadian. An active involvement of multicultural organizations in the development and delivery of ESL pathways to literacy can directly address the frustrations, fears and difficulties that people who cannot speak English encounter as they strive to build new lives here.

They can also act as a source of help and information for these individuals, making it possible for them to cope as they move towards their goal of literacy.

Here, too, the appropriate model is learner centred and community-based — with the multicultural community in Manitoba playing a growing role in providing realistic pathways to literacy for the ESL learner.

Government's Response

The Foundations For A Broader Highway, More Varied Pathways

Manitoba has made some encouraging beginnings in the development of approaches to literacy that respond to the reality of the learner — the individual who, for his or her own purposes, is seeking to become literate.

The school system is broadening its efforts to provide a highway to literacy that more can travel, focusing resources and expertise on the "at-risk" student, providing flexible access to students seeking to return to school, and participating in innovative efforts to provide appropriate pathways for the adult learner outside of traditional school cultures.

The Adult and Continuing Education Branch of Manitoba Education has supported the development of learner centred, community-based adult literacy programs in some parts of Manitoba through the "New Initiatives Program". They have sponsored a "Learners' Conference" which has the potential to become a valuable source of insights into literacy problems and opportunities in Manitoba, and a focus for encouraging and motivating more Manitobans to become learners.

Manitoba does not have enough ESL or ESL literacy programs. There are, however, a number of effective programs in the province.

The resources that have been applied to promoting literacy, however, are inadequate to meet the need. There are far too few community based literacy programs. There are shortages of literacy materials. There is inadequate research being conducted in literacy.

Professional development efforts focused on literacy, on special needs, on adult education and on the at risk student are all in an essentially embryonic stage.

Literacy activities and resources are not effectively coordinated or accessible to those striving to develop community based programs.

There is a serious shortage of adequate support services for the learner — such as child care, transportation, financial support or access to materials.

The beginnings of an effective government response to the problems and opportunities of literacy in Manitoba are here — in the evolving understanding of the literacy field, of the phenomenon of the learner, the growing acceptance of community based approaches to literacy, and a growing recognition of the importance of literacy for the entire Manitoba community.

Potential partners for government abound — in the Aboriginal community, the multicultural community and throughout the education community as a whole. There is potential for positive and creative involvement from industry, organized labour and the media.

There are also a wide range of successful models for the delivery of literacy services in Manitoba — from programs that combine literacy and employment training experience to programs that respond specifically to literacy needs among urban Aboriginal people. These models can be further developed and applied more widely across the province.

In effect, Manitoba today has an opportunity to build a community-wide set of partnerships that can result in the development of a broader highway and more varied pathways to literacy for Manitobans.

The Next Building Step: Formalizing The Learner Centred, Community-Based Nature Of Literacy Programs In Manitoba

In the view of the Task Force, Manitoba today has an opportunity to make very significant gains in literacy for all its citizens through formal measures to link learners, learner communities, others throughout the literacy and education fields, and the community at large in a coordinated effort to provide appropriate pathways to literacy for all Manitoba learners.

Among the issues that must be addressed are:

- the establishment of long term, secure and clearly understood funding policies and criteria for community-based adult literacy programs
- the provision of adequate supports to permit learners to achieve their literacy goals
- enhanced coordination of all groups participating in literacy
- enhanced involvement of the multicultural community in ESL programs
- the development of appropriate adult learner materials for all learner communities
- enhanced literacy awareness among all educators
- enhanced appropriate programs to encourage people to become learners
- enhanced involvement of parents and the community in literacy promotion
- development and dissemination of new teaching/learning technologies and methods
- enhanced responses to special needs in all parts of the education/literacy community
- enhanced literacy research
- development of appropriate training opportunities for literacy workers.

Changes in social and economic conditions lead to changed motivations among learners and potential learners. Motivation is an essential component in the acquistion of literacy, but there is still a need to address causal factors such as housing, health, employment, cultural values, personal attitudes and community standards.

The Focus For Future Efforts: The Manitoba Adult Literacy Council

The main recommendation of this Task Force calls for the establishment of an Adult Literacy Council, reporting directly to the Minister of Education, and providing for the direct and ongoing involvement of communities and learners throughout Manitoba, educators and the community at large in a comprehensive approach to adult literacy for Manitobans.

The critical issue to be addressed in this new approach is the relative power of the service provider and the service recipient.

Too many educational models reflect the custodial, *in loco parentis* culture of the school. In the case of Manitoba's adult learners and emerging learner communities, it is appropriate that the strategies we develop be responsive to the will and the shared and personal goals that have led communities and individuals to become learners, as well as providing for the development and application of the necessary professional skills among service providers.

The recommendations in the final chapter of this report will result in such an appropriate balance.

The Strategy For Literacy For Manitobans

The Task Force Recommendations

In the body of this report, we have described an evolving view of literacy, driven by the personal goals and personal searches for literacy of adult learners and learning communities throughout Manitoba.

In addition to the traditional "highway to literacy" provided by the school system, this view envisages a wide range of other "pathways to literacy" that respond to the reality of the adult learner.

The transformation of the literacy field from one in which skills — interpreted in terms of grade levels and viewed as being primarily of economic value — are "administered", to one in which motivated adults and communities seek literacy for their own purposes, including cultural, social, religious, political and other purposes, is in the view of this Task Force a positive transformation.

The recommendations here are intended to enhance government's ability to play a positive and supportive role — in collaboration with learners and communities across Manitoba, educators and the community at large — in the development of the range of pathways for the learner that can result in literacy for all Manitobans.

Policy

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Manitoba develop a literacy policy based on:

- **a clear statement that achieving literacy for all Manitobans is a community-wide goal and responsibility**
- **an understanding of literacy itself as the successful development of reading, writing, mathematical and communicating skills necessary for the achievement of personal and shared community goals**
- **a commitment to pluralistic literacy development that is learner centred and community based across Manitoba.**

Discussion:

As our society has changed, literacy has become increasingly critical for individuals if they are to have opportunities for financial success, self-development or self fulfillment. The growing economic, human and social costs of illiteracy must be of concern to the entire community.

Government and other parts of the community can make the greatest contribution to the goal of literacy for all Manitobans if literacy itself is understood in terms of the personal and community goals of learners and learner communities across the province.

The knowledge and expertise needed to achieve literacy exists in many parts of government and the private sector in Manitoba. A policy that strives to provide access to this knowledge and expertise within the context of a learner centred, community based literacy system can best meet the needs that exist throughout the province.

Funding

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Manitoba assess the need for adult literacy services in all parts of the province, and ensure that there is sufficient funding available to enable all who seek literacy to have access to such services, and to the necessary support services required for successful learning.

Discussion:

Throughout Manitoba individuals and communities have identified the achievement of literacy as important to their own individual and shared goals. The energy these learners and learner communities bring to the search for literacy can be dissipated if funding is uncertain or unavailable.

Relative to the costs of other human services, the social investment required for a comprehensive literacy initiative in Manitoba is modest. Its potential returns — in economic, human and social terms — are immense.

The Manitoba Adult Literacy Council

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Manitoba establish a Manitoba Adult Literacy Council, reporting directly to the Minister of Education. The membership of the Council should include senior representation from:

- **learning communities throughout Manitoba, including significant representation from the Aboriginal and Multicultural communities and from all regions of Manitoba**
- **adult learners throughout the literacy community**
- **literacy workers and other educators**
- **the educational system, including schools, private educational institutions, community colleges and universities**
- **industry, labour and the media.**

Recommendation 4

That the Adult Literacy Council be provided with funding and resources to support literacy activities, in collaboration with the community at large, with five main areas of focus:

- **Aboriginal literacy**
- **Multicultural literacy**
- **Urban literacy**
- **Rural literacy**
- **Northern literacy.**

Discussion:

At the present time in Manitoba, adult literacy is a secondary or subsidiary area of activity for many parts of the educational system. There is a clear need for institutional arrangements that will focus specifically on literacy as a priority goal.

The Manitoba Literacy Council will provide the institutional basis for collaboration among all communities and all parts of the educational system, and for the broadest possible involvement of the community at large in the evolution of learner centred, community based literacy strategies.

The Task Force believes the Council will provide an effective and appropriate forum for policy development, needs assessment and for the development of community based strategies to address the five areas of priority need identified in our recommendation.

To be effective, the Council will require resources to enable it to fund community based programs and the ability to coordinate literacy activities throughout the government.

The Literacy Office

Recommendation 5

That the Adult Literacy Council be supported through a new Literacy Office to be created within Manitoba Education. The Literacy Office should be headed by a Manitoba Literacy Coordinator, reporting to the Council, and provided with staff and resources sufficient to support the work of the Council including:

- **policy development and needs assessment, including an assessment of literacy problems and opportunities in the Franco-Manitoban community**
- **community development and outreach programs**
- **literacy awareness programs**
- **development of criteria for literacy programming**
- **coordination of government activities related to literacy work and services**
- **coordination and promotion of broad community involvement in literacy awareness and literacy programs**
- **support for information exchange and networking among literacy programs to promote the development of effective literacy models**
- **support for enhanced development of the provincial and community "Learners' Conferences"**
- **support for and dissemination of literacy research in Manitoba**
- **support for the development and dissemination of adult literacy materials that are responsive to the needs and interests of learners and learner communities throughout Manitoba**
- **support for and dissemination of alternative literacy teaching/learning methods and technology including distance learning techniques and computer aided literacy programming**
- **the promotion of literacy training in the workplace**
- **assessment of particular requirements and the development of effective responses for special needs learners, seniors, inmates and women.**

Discussion:

To be effective, the Literacy Council must have its own dedicated staff and resources. The Task Force believes the Literacy Office can be established by redeploying current Manitoba Education staff for the most part, and that few if any net new positions will have to be created.

A large part of the work of the office will involve the more effective coordination of the literacy activities that already occur throughout the government. There are resources and expertise in the community colleges and elsewhere in the education system that can be adapted and delivered through community based literacy programs. The impact of these resources and expertise can be enhanced through the stronger learner and community voice that will result from the work of the Adult Literacy Council and the Literacy Office.

To this end, the Literacy Office will coordinate relationships with regional and local literacy groups that are representative of their communities and have special insights into literacy concerns in the various regions and cultural groupings of Manitoba.

Where there are identified gaps in service — like the lack of transitional programs or arrangements for inmate learners — the Literacy Office will work with other parts of government to address these needs.

It will be important that community development staff who will be responsible for working in Aboriginal literacy activities themselves be Aboriginals, and desirable that they be fluent and literate in Aboriginal mother tongues as well as in English. Similarly, it will be desirable that community development staff who will be responsible for working in multicultural literacy activities be familiar with a variety of the languages and cultures of Manitoba.

The Task Force would envision the Literacy Office working with learners through the Learners' Conferences, and with other parts of the educational and general communities in the support and development of literacy research and materials that could be made available to communities through "Learning Centres" that could be housed in appropriate facilities throughout Manitoba and that could also address the lack of availability of books in many communities.

One promising avenue for the extension of such services is the development of more effective and better supported library services. The Literacy Office will examine the potential for such actions to enhance the "literacy infrastructure" of communities across Manitoba.

The Literacy Office will administer Adult Literacy grants to community based programs that will be made through the Literacy Council. The office will be able to enter into contracts for the delivery of service by other organizations within and outside the government, including contracts for the development of literacy materials and for literacy research.

Under the policy we have recommended, and through the institutional structure of the Literacy Council and Literacy Office, learners and learning communities across Manitoba will have the capacity to develop the varied pathways to literacy that are needed by diverse groups and individuals throughout the province.

Supports For the Learner

Recommendation 6

That the Literacy Council and Literacy Office — in collaboration with other Departments of Government — review the adequacy of supports available to permit learners to participate in literacy programs, including measures that address the socio-economic conditions that can contribute to continued illiteracy.

Discussion:

Throughout our hearings in Manitoba, we heard of the barriers that lack of child care, lack of transportation and lack of financial resources represent for learners. The establishment of community based adult literacy programs can provide the pathways to literacy that Manitobans need, but unless appropriate supports are provided, too many will be unable to follow those pathways.

If government's commitment to literacy for all Manitobans is to be real and effective, it is essential that appropriate supports be available.

Awareness

Recommendation 7

That the Literacy Council, in collaboration with the educational community and the community at large, develop and implement awareness programs to ensure that the value of literacy and the availability of literacy services are widely understood throughout the community.

Discussion:

In the past, it was possible for the illiterate or functionally illiterate individual to cope successfully with many aspects of life in Manitoba. With changes in technology and the labour market, and with the growing literacy of the community as a whole, this will be true for fewer and fewer people. The illiterate's options will be increasingly limited.

It is necessary that the community understand this, so that they will understand and support the efforts of learners and learner communities throughout Manitoba, and it is important that potential learners know of the pathways to literacy that Manitoba will provide for all our citizens.

Libraries can play a positive and creative role in increasing public awareness of literacy in all parts of Manitoba.

Especially in remote or isolated rural and northern communities, mobile library services can provide a support and a focus for literacy efforts by strengthening the literacy infrastructure of these communities.

1990 — The International Year of Literacy

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Manitoba commit itself to the most rapid practical development of province wide, learner centred, community-based programs for adult literacy to mark 1990 as the International Year of Literacy and that, in addition, the government provide leadership in the initiation of a joint government-media-industry campaign aimed at the prevention of illiteracy by raising awareness of critical factors that can contribute to the achievement of literacy among children.

Discussion:

The Task Force believes that the best observance Manitoba can make of the International Year of Literacy will be to take the steps necessary to permit the rapid development of the learner centred, community based adult literacy programs that Manitoba learners need.

There are also a range of ways in which the community at large can contribute to the prevention of illiteracy by promoting successful learning among children.

Parents can vastly improve their children's chances of achieving literacy by reading aloud to the child prior to his or her entry into school; where libraries exist and have the resources, they can operate outreach programs to reach the children of illiterates and other potential at-risk students; Aboriginal leaders and educators can participate in community early intervention programs; media can help communicate the value of literacy; industry can provide leadership and resources and can communicate with Manitobans in the workplace.

The International Year of Literacy reflects a worldwide awareness of the growing importance of reading, writing, calculating and communicating skills to the quality of life available to the individual. Manitoba can manifest the value it places on literacy for all its citizens through a campaign like the one we are recommending.

The At-Risk Student

Recommendation 9

That Manitoba Education encourage the development of initiatives to identify and respond to the needs of "at-risk" students including:

- **parental support and early intervention programs, based on enhanced parent-school communication and positive measures to support parental involvement in the student's work at school and at home**
- **the funding and development of alternative programs for at-risk students including such initiatives as programs combining employment and education, flexible scheduling and enrollment, and the provision of school services in places other than the school where that is appropriate**
- **the development of linkages between schools and community-based adult literacy programs to permit sharing of resources and expertise and to permit referral and exchange of participants where this is an appropriate response to the at-risk student**
- **support for the efforts of Aboriginal communities to provide a school experience that is responsive to the culture and realities of Aboriginal youngsters in Manitoba**
- **support for enhanced programs for special needs students including preventive pre-school programs with parental and community involvement.**

Recommendation 10

That resources be made available to school divisions whose schools are prepared to participate in the implementation of a five year literacy plan, developed within the community and with the involvement of community members as well as school personnel, to deal with problems of drop outs including the provision of school resources and expertise to support community-based adult literacy programs; progress in the completion of such plans should be monitored annually.

Discussion:

The Task Force believes that success in the school system's "highway to literacy" is still the least disruptive and preferred route for the vast majority of Manitobans. The school system is facing a wide range of challenges and there will always be some who find that success elusive, but efforts to broaden that highway to accommodate a larger proportion of all young people represent a fundamental and important challenge for schools and educators in Manitoba.

Similarly, enhanced systematic and collaborative efforts to provide pathways back in for those who leave school prior to achieving literacy can help many young people avoid being trapped in life long illiteracy.

Funding of Aboriginal Literacy

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Manitoba initiate discussions with the federal government, urging that literacy activities for Status Indians be considered a fundable federal education service on reserves, in urban setting and elsewhere in Manitoba.

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Manitoba take the initiative to resolve current jurisdictional problems in the funding of community-based literacy programs on Indian reserves in Manitoba, with the aim of negotiating an appropriate funding agreement and grant mechanism to ensure that these programs have access to stable, long term and flexible funding.

Recommendation 13

That, notwithstanding the outcomes of these discussions with the federal government, Manitoba acknowledge a responsibility to provide funding and resources to support the achievement of literacy by all of the members of Manitoba's Aboriginal Community.

Discussion:

There are anomalies and gaps in current funding arrangements for Aboriginal literacy. The federal government is responsible for funding schools on reserves but has not, to date, considered adult literacy to be a fundable education service.

The problem of Aboriginal illiteracy exists in part because, in the past, the federally funded school system has been unable to provide a highway to literacy that most could travel.

Along with improvements in Aboriginal schools — many of which are now occurring as Aboriginal educators and the community itself assume greater responsibility for and control over education — there is a need for flexible learner centred, community based adult literacy programs to meet the needs of adult learners throughout the Aboriginal community.

It is important to resolve both funding sources and responsibility for standards between the federal and provincial governments, and to ensure that communities are clearly informed of the criteria for and availability of funding. In addition, there is a need for funding stability. Current short term federal and provincial funding for adult literacy is not adequate to permit the evolution of successful community based programs.

Notwithstanding federal actions in their areas of jurisdiction and responsibility, the Task Force believes that Manitoba has a role and a responsibility to provide funding and resources to support the achievement of literacy by all Manitobans, including the members of Manitoba's Aboriginal community.

Manitoba's Role In Aboriginal Literacy

Recommendation 14

That the Government of Manitoba, through the Adult Literacy Council, collaborate with the Aboriginal community and others in the development of:

- **appropriate Aboriginal literacy materials, including mother tongue literacy resources**
- **distance learning, computer aided literacy programs and other teaching/learning technologies that can address problems of isolation**
- **appropriate English As A Second Language resources and programs for Aboriginal people in Manitoba.**

Recommendation 15

That Aboriginal Manitobans be eligible for participation in ESL programs.

Discussion:

Much of the education that Aboriginal people have been offered in the past, and much of the existing literacy materials, have been seen to be insensitive and irrelevant to Aboriginal reality or culture. A significant component in the emergence of the Aboriginal community in Manitoba as a learner community is a desire to strengthen and retain their culture as part of a global trend to growing Aboriginal community responsibility for and control over its own affairs.

Appropriate pathways to literacy for Aboriginal learners require materials and teaching/learning methods that reflect their experience and culture, the goals of individual learners and of the community as a learner community, and the realities of isolation that affect many Aboriginal communities.

They also require an understanding of the fact that, for many Aboriginal people, English is a second language and appropriate ESL training is a prerequisite for the achievement of English literacy.

There is also a desire in the Aboriginal community for the development of mother tongue literacy. This desire is especially strong in Island Lake — an isolated community with its own unique dialect. The Task Force believes that mother tongue literacy can contribute both to motivation and success for the learner in his or her efforts to acquire English language literacy and should be supported by the province.

English As A Second Language

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Manitoba encourage the delivery of community-based ESL and ESL literacy programs:

- **in a variety of settings, i.e. schools, community colleges, private institutions, community centres or any other location appropriate and accessible to ESL learners**
- **in conjunction with child care centres to ensure children acquire language skills adequate for successful entry into the school system and including, where appropriate, ESL instruction for parents as well**
- **involving teachers and/or teacher's aides who speak the mother tongue of learners**
- **that provide stability for the learner with the greatest possible continuity of program so as to minimize the necessity for transfer among institutions**
- **that are consistent or at least easily comparable among provinces**
- **that are accessible to immigrants and refugees immediately upon their arrival in Canada.**

Recommendation 17

That the Government of Manitoba, through the Adult Literacy Council, collaborate with the multicultural community in the development of literacy materials and teaching/learning methods that are appropriate for and responsive to the backgrounds, culture and motivations of ESL learners.

Discussion:

Immigrants and refugees need an opportunity to acquire English language fluency and literacy in order to build new lives for themselves in Manitoba. There is an opportunity for significant improvement in their access to these skills through the development of more flexible, learner centred and community based literacy programs, and through the provision of literacy materials that reflect the prior experience of these learners.

Many who spoke to the Task Force stressed their desire to have instructors or assistants to instructors who were fluent in the participants' mother tongues.

The Task Force believes there is significant potential for strengthening of ESL pathways to literacy through broader collaboration with the multicultural community in Manitoba, and would see a growing involvement of that community in these activities as a key literacy strategy for the province.

Recommendation 18

That the Government of Manitoba encourage and participate in the development of materials to permit ESL and ESL literacy programs to:

- **include Canadian content, including information on the culture, values and law of Canada**
- **reflect and respond to ethnic, cross cultural and linguistic aspects of literacy.**

Discussion:

Many of those who spoke to the Task Force emphasized their need for greater understanding of Canadian laws, values and customs in order to establish themselves successfully in Canada. The development of materials that communicate this information as part and parcel of the literacy experience responds directly to the motivation of these learners — an essential component in a learner centred approach to literacy.

Recommendation 19

That the government ensure that the teacher-student ratio for ESL programs in which the learners are illiterate in their mother tongue be low enough to ensure personal attention and instruction, and that the size of classes in all ESL programs be reviewed to ensure adequate ratios and access to instruction.

Discussion:

Especially where ESL learners are illiterate in their mother tongues, there is a need for intensive personal instruction that can only be provided when the student has ample opportunity to interact directly with the teacher. Some learners and educators who spoke to the Task Force expressed their concern that ESL classes in general were often too large to permit effective learning. This should be reviewed.

Recommendation 20

That immigrants and refugees with technical skills and/or university accreditation be provided with appropriate job training after completion of a general ESL course, with emphasis on development of specialized vocabularies relevant to their fields, in order to assist them in meeting requirements for the recognition of their overseas accreditation by the appropriate Canadian bodies.

Discussion:

As noted in the body of this report, the Task Force makes no judgement as to the fairness and appropriateness with which governing bodies of the professions and other groups evaluate overseas credentials, although we believe this area should be reviewed by government. In any case, the provision of appropriate job related training to permit individuals to become able to work in their own fields as quickly as possible can contribute to their success and to the contribution they can make to Manitoba.

Recommendation 21

That student aid and other support services be provided to all ESL students, including immigrants as well as refugees, and that this aid include child care services for ESL learners in Manitoba.

Discussion:

For many ESL learners, the period from their arrival in Manitoba until they have achieved adequate fluency and literacy marks an hiatus in their progress towards full membership in our community. The lack of support services — transportation, financial assistance and, of particular concern to women, child care services — can act as an effective barrier to literacy. The federal government currently provides assistance to refugees, but not to immigrants. Both groups require access to supports in order to have real access to literacy.

Recommendation 22

That support be given for the operation of outreach activities by ESL and ESL Literacy programs to ensure that potential ESL learners are aware of and have realistic access to these programs.

Discussion:

A wide range of cultural, linguistic or financial factors can act as barriers to entry into ESL programs by refugees and immigrants. These barriers can be particularly strong in the case of women.

Some ESL programs with strong links to multicultural organizations have already demonstrated the effectiveness of outreach programs in encouraging individuals to become learners. This should be encouraged.

Recommendation 23

That Manitoba Education and community colleges recognize ESL qualification achieved by learners in private educational institutions and community based programs.

Discussion:

The ability to move from ESL learning to broader educational opportunities is a prime motivation for many ESL learners in Manitoba. In a learner centred, community based approach to literacy, learners themselves will choose which programs to participate in, and there should be provision for their achievements in these programs to be recognized by the educational system.

Training and Education For Educators and Literacy Workers

Recommendation 24

That teacher education programs be revised to increase the number of required course credits for literacy education, with course content to include:

- **awareness and sensitivity to the range of educational needs and learning styles**
- **awareness and sensitivity to cross cultural factors, including enhanced understanding of the value of mother tongues**
- **enhanced focus on special needs, including physical handicaps, learning disorders and other conditions that can act as barriers to learning for individuals in Manitoba**
- **enhanced understanding of the reading and writing processes**
- **enhanced undertanding of the means whereby language is "naturally" acquired in a social context**
- **enhanced focus on adult learning and adult education**

Recommendation 25

That schools should give priority to professional development activities of teachers on the development of:

- **appropriate sensitivity to learning styles**
- **remedial strategies for at-risk students**
- **the capacity to meet the needs of special needs students**
- **greater understanding of the value of and ability to promote parental involvement in education.**

Recommendation 26

That teachers of ESL literacy courses should hold appropriate professional qualifications.

Recommendation 27

That the Government of Manitoba support the development of opportunities for skills enhancement and professional development among Literacy Workers throughout the province, including the promotion of networking and information exchanges and opportunities to participate in the development of literacy materials and teaching/learning techniques that respond to the needs of learners and communities throughout the province.

Recommendation 28

That the Government of Manitoba support a "Literacy Workers' Conference" to give literacy workers the opportunity to build relationships, develop skills, exchange information and meet directly with the Adult Literacy Council on a regular basis.

Discussion:

Although within the Task Force's view of literacy, the primary agent of change is the learner him or herself, the role of the educator is a complex and challenging one.

As achieving better literacy outcomes becomes a higher priority for the school system and for ESL and other literacy programs, there will be a need for the development of additional skills and training.

The Task Force would hope that, through the collaborative relationships that will result from the work of the Literacy Council and with the active participation of professional organizations in the education field, appropriate training resources — for teachers in the school system, for ESL and ESL literacy teachers, and for literacy workers across Manitoba — will evolve to respond to the needs of learner centred, community-based literacy programs across Manitoba.

Conclusion

The need for literacy among Manitobans — if they are to lead lives that are as full and successful as they ought to be — is greater now than ever before in our history.

And today, the phenomenon of the learner and the learner community — individuals and groups who are pursuing literacy for their individual and shared purposes — provides Manitoba with an opportunity to make progress towards our goal of literacy for all Manitobans.

The Task Force believes the recommendations here can provide a firm basis for that progress now and in the future.